United Nations

Press Release

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WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Secretary-General to report to Security Council on situation in Iraq.

- Crown Prince of Kuwait promises all necessary assistance to United Nations special mission currently in Kuwait assessing damage caused by Iraqi occupation.

- Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator reports 70,000 cases of cholera in Peru. Peruvian Vice-President appeals to international community not to cut off trade with Peru due to epidemic.

- Special Committee against Apartheid to observe International Day for Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

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A United Nations official announced today that Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar will present a report by Under-Secretary-General Martti Ahtisaari to the Security Council tomorrow describing the "extremely serious" situation in Iraq.

The official said that the report painted "a grim picture of the situation faced by Iraqis following the war". He said Mr. Ahtisaari, who arrived in New York earlier today, would be returning to Kuwait over the weekend to complete his assessment of humanitarian needs in the country.

Also tomorrow, the Secretary-General will inform Security Council members of his choice for Special Representative for the Middle East. The Council will also discuss the mandate of the United Nations Peace-keeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP).

In a separate development, the Security Council's Sanctions Committee has described the economies of Syria and Djibouti as having been severely affected by the trade embargo against Iraq. Syria had informed the Committee that it had suffered national losses totalling over $2 billion, and Djibouti claimed to have lost over $140 million.

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The Committee has appealed to the international community to provide immediate technical, financial and material assistance to the two countries, and to United Nations agencies to help as well.

In other news, the Security Council has agreed to arrange the modalities for Iraq's return of Kuwaiti property through the Office of the Secretary-General in consultation with the parties. Council President Peter Hohenfellner of Austria informed the Secretary-General of the Council's agreement on the issue yesterday.

In a further development, Iraqi Ambassador Abdul Amir Al-Anbari has informed the United Nations of the situation of Kuwaiti military aircraft. In a letter to the Secretary-General and the Council President, he said 11 fighter jets had been destroyed, two damaged as a result of air raids, and 11 remained in good condition.

Regarding military transport planes, the Iraqi Ambassador said two had been damaged and one was in good condition. He reported that only two of nine helicopters were in good condition while the other seven had either been destroyed or were not working.

The Ambassador reasserted Iraq's right to Iraqi military property left on Kuwaiti soil. He said a number of tanks, vehicles and other military material had been left due to "the disorderly withdrawal" and a list would be presented at a later time.

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Today the head of the United Nations special mission to Kuwait, Abdulrahim Farah, met Kuwait's Crown Prince and Prime Minister Sheikh Saad Al-Abdulla Al-Salem Al-Sabah along with other Kuwaiti government officials.

During the meeting, the mandate of the mission, its progress of work and the difficulties it is encountering in discharging its task were discussed. The Crown Prince expressed his appreciation for the United Nations and the mission, and promised to provide all necessary assistance to expedite its work, particularly logistical support.

Yesterday, Mr. Farah met with Sheikh Nasser Al-Sabah, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, to review the progress of work of the mission and to coordinate its activities with the Kuwaiti Government and other groups working in areas of concern to the mission. Meanwhile, United Nations experts visited various damaged sites, such as government institutions; oil refineries; power plants; urban areas; and educational, financial, social and health institutions.

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According to a report by the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO), at least 70,000 cases of cholera have been diagnosed in Peru. So far 382 are reported dead as a result of the epidemic, the Agency said.

The UNDRO reported that although the number of cases was increasing and extending throughout the country, the proportion of deaths in relation to cases remained stable. Water and sanitation measures remained a priority, and international assistance was needed, the Agency said.

Briefing correspondents on the effects of the epidemic, the Vice-President of Peru said today that many countries had cut off trade with Peru due to the cholera outbreak. Referring to a report by the World Health Organization (WHO) on Peruvian fish produce, he said the WHO reported that there was no danger that the cholera could be exported from Peru. Fish caught in the high seas off the coast of Peru were not contaminated, he said. However, if they were brought in contact with vendors the possibility of contamination would increase. He called on the international community not to cut off exports of Peruvian products because of the cholera.

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The Special Committee against Apartheid will hold a solemn meeting tomorrow 21 March, in observance of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, proclaimed by the General Assembly in 1966.

The annual observance coincides with the thirty-first anniversary of the Sharpeville massacre when South African police, unprovoked, opened gunfire on several thousand demonstrators who were peacefully protesting against apartheid laws requiring Africans to carry passes at all time.

The Special Committee has invited, among others, the President of the General Assembly, the President of the Security Council, the Chairmen of the relevant United Nations organs and Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar to participate in the observance.

The Committee has also invited as special guests the Mayor of New York City, David Dinkins, and New Jersey Governor James Florio to speak on the occasion.

The Chairman of the Special Committee against Apartheid, Ibrahim A. Gambari (Nigeria), said in a statement that with the unfolding developments in South Africa, "the complex process of change in South Africa would give rise to a dynamic debate on the future of that country". Open debate was essential, he said, to help define both the basic aspects of a post-apartheid society and the incipient elements of what a true democratic system could be.

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